

**EFFECT OF MINDFULNESS BIBLIOTHERAPY ON KINESIOLOGY STUDENTS**

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## **Abstract**

This project explores the perceived effect of mindfulness bibliotherapy and underlying reasons behind the effects on college students. We used audiobook version of Zen Mind Beginner's written by Shunryu Suzuki in order to simplify the bibliotherapy process and decrease the burden of participation. In this research students were provided with the bibliotherapy content and were instructed to study the material within seven days. Fourteen to twenty one days after finishing the book, a semi- structured interviews were conducted with five participants (two male and three female) who were in the fourth and final year of their education as undergraduate students. The objective of this Thematic analysis of the data highlighted four main effects that enabled the participation to deal with stress and anxiety.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Like many students, I was struggling with a variety of problems in my life while working on my undergraduate degree. On one side, having recently immigrated to Canada, I was attempting to explore my new environment and make the adaptations to it that I needed to make, and, on the other side, the pressure of the workload I was experiencing from school and life chores was burning me out. It was not until my third year of undergraduate work that I took a course taught by Dr. Shehid, who has also supervised this master project. In his class, he introduced many concepts from Zen philosophy and encouraged students to participate in a short mindfulness practice during the day. What Dr. Shehid had to say about Zen philosophy somehow created a level of comfort and calmness inside me, which motivated me to take further steps toward practicing mindfulness, in particular mindfulness meditation. Those practices helped me to develop the skills required to deal with my negative emotions and relax my body and mind so that I could face the chaos that I was experiencing inside me. Since then, I have received a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which positively revolutionized my life and helped me to understand and frame a large part of the emotions I was and am continuing to experience.

The preceding paragraph summarizes my motivation as to why I felt the need to take on this research and study the effects of mindfulness practices on students.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as “bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis” (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999, p. 68). Mindfulness practice involves directing one’s attention to a single focal point, primarily breathing, which helps the practitioner to focus on being aware of all incoming thoughts and feelings and accepting them while not attaching or reacting to them. This process is known as “observing self” and aids in disengaging from self-criticism, rumination, and dysphoric mood that can arise when reacting to negative thinking patterns. The effects of mindfulness practice intrigued psychologists to the extent that they have adopted mindfulness practices as a therapeutic tool. As Arthur J. Deikman said in his book, *Observing Self*, the most significant application of mindfulness in clinical psychology is observing one’s self, as it enables individuals to systematically recognize and identify distorted or dysfunctional thoughts as they surface (Deikman, 1982). In conventional cognitive therapy, therapists try to help patients by changing the content of their thoughts, perhaps by suggesting counterexamples that minimize overgeneralization or other cognitive distortions. Accordingly, the aim of meditation therapy is not to change the content of the thought itself, but rather to change the client’s attitude toward or relationship to the particular thought (Beck, Wright, Newman, & Liese, 1993).

Awareness of the effects of meditation and acceptance of its potential therapeutic use in a clinical setting have motivated researchers to study its possible application among different populations. Study of the effects and benefits of meditation would be even more important in the populations of undergraduate students, who are dealing with their school workload and facing important questions in their lives:

- How can they explore their interests and decide what to do with their lives?
- How can they face the unknown and how to deal with their emotions?
- And how to focus on the present as they plan for long-term goals?

Research has shown that anxiety and depression rates are growing among millennials. The American Psychology Association reported the following: In the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers, counsellors participating in the survey reported that 52% of their clients had severe psychological problems, an increase from 44% in 2013. A majority of respondents noted increases over the past five years of anxiety disorders, crises requiring immediate response, psychiatric medication issues, and clinical depression (Gallagher, Robert, 2015). In a 2016 survey of students by the American College Health Association, 52.7% of students surveyed reported feeling that things were hopeless and 39.1% reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult for them to function during the past 12 months.”

Many factors have been identified to explain this rise in psychological issues in the past decades. Research has identified many of them, including academic pressure and concern about career choices. However, amount of screen time seems to be the factor most strongly correlated with depression and anxiety (Twenge, 2017). For example, a research carried out by evaluating 200 Facebook profiles of college students suggested that those who received online reinforcement from their friends were more likely to discuss their depressive symptoms publicly. This finding shows the possible role that social media plays in college students' psychological issues. (Moreno et al., 2011) Through social media, students view an edited-and-improved version of their peers' lives, resulting in development of unrealistic life expectations and in framing present experiences in a negative light. Other research has supported these findings; one

study reported that maladaptive aspects of perfectionism were correlated with burnout and disengagement in students (Zhang, Gan, & Cham, 2007).

The issues that college students experience and the effect of mindfulness on its practitioners raise the question of whether the study of the effect of mindfulness on college students would be worthwhile. In fact, much research has confirmed that college students skilled at emotional regulation, which mindfulness practices help to cultivate, are affected less by distress than the remainder of their cohorts (Hill & Christina, 2012). Another study suggested that mindfulness not only helps one to regulate emotional distress and protect mental health but also helps improve the body's ability to fight stress (Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, & Nicol, 2016).

After discovering such a finding, one might ask why universities do not implement a systematic mindfulness practice for students. Students at different levels and through many sources are being informed of the positive effects of mindfulness practices and are being encouraged to participate in one, but students rarely take the initiative to practice. The reason behind such a difference has not been studied. However, partially explaining it are the lack of information on step-by-step instructions on starting and executing such a practice and the expense and resources required to implement a full-scale mindfulness teaching process at universities, which would seem to make it logistically impossible. Thus, universities need to look into other options to promote mindfulness.

Important to note is the problem of scalability in implementing full-scale mindfulness teaching, which is not limited to mindfulness. This issue arises in all settings where face-to-face interaction is required in accomplish a goal. Because of this problem, researchers have been looking into unconventional options on how to alter cognitive states through less costly means while trying to avoid discounting the effect of cognitive changes.



## **Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy is defined in different ways by various sources. However, in a general sense, it can be described as “therapy with books” (Pardeck, 1989). Bibliotherapy is a type of creative therapy modality that employs published articles to alter the perspectives of the readers relative to their mental issues. By doing so, it helps them to better deal with their psychological discomfort. The history of bibliotherapy in America goes back at least to the early part of the 19th century. Reading was recognized as one of the best therapeutic methods for treating mental patients, and, by the mid-19th century, every major mental hospital had a patient library. Since then, research has been conducted to study the magnitude and effect of bibliotherapy. For example, based on reports, no significant differences between the effects of bibliotherapy and therapist-administered treatments exist, including no significant erosion of effect sizes at follow-up. In addition, bibliotherapy appears to be more effective for certain problem types, including anxiety, emotional regulation, and sexual dysfunction, than for other problems (weight loss and addiction) (Marrs, 1995).

Overall, the amount of therapist contact during bibliotherapy does not seem to relate to its effectiveness, but evidence suggests that certain problem types, including weight loss and addiction-related problems, respond better with increased therapist contact. Because of these findings, therapists are now increasingly using bibliotherapy to overcome the logistical obstacles associated with therapy, where distance from the patient or the expense of the therapy make delivering care to patients difficult. Findings about the effectiveness of bibliotherapy have motivated researchers to study the effect of mindfulness-based reading on different populations, including college students. In one study, during their courses of study, participants went through a 6- to 12-week program during which they were provided with reading materials to study and

participated in a writing exercise. One study of the effect of mindfulness bibliotherapy on perfectionism and perceived stress on randomly selected subjects reported that, compared to the study control group, the intervention group showed significantly greater gains ( $p < 0.001$ ) over time (6 weeks) with respect to measures of perfectionism and perceived stress (Wimberley, Mintz, & Suh, 2015).

Another study on the effect of stress reduction included 92 college students. The intervention group, which went through a 10-week program that included reading and writing components, reported significant decreases in measures of depression, anxiety, stress, perceived stress, and anxiety sensitivity (Hazlett-Stevens & Oren, 2017).

Although seeing the positive effects reported by mindfulness bibliotherapy studies on many aspects of psychological distresses is encouraging, the high dropout rate of participants in mindfulness bibliotherapy research remains a concern. For example, in the study of 92 students mentioned earlier, only 62 students actually completed the program and were included in the final data analysis (Hazlett-Stevens & Oren, 2017). In a study on perfectionism and perceived stress, the dropout rate was close to 28% (Wimberley et al., 2015). The reason behind this dropout rate is unknown, but the workload and time required to complete the mindfulness bibliotherapy programs could partially explain the high dropout rate.

In light of the information above, I was motivated to study the effect of mindfulness bibliotherapy on college students when instructions and length of bibliotherapy program are minimal. In this study, following the mindfulness program was simple and straightforward, and the duration of the program was shortened to a great degree. Placing ease of participation for research participants as the main priority for this research project, I used the audiobook version of the book to study the effect of mindfulness bibliotherapy on students. With the extremely

simplified instructions and the reduction in the duration of the program, this study attempted to answer the following primary research questions:

- (a) what are the effects of bibliotherapy with minimal instruction on college students?
- (b) What are the perceived reasons behind the effects experienced by the study participants?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Because this project attempted to study the perceived effects of mindfulness bibliotherapy and the subjective experience of those affected, this study employed a qualitative research method.

Research subjects were chosen from students registered in courses offered by York University. Upon selection, I screened potential participants to ensure that they were full-time students at York University and also that they had time to listen to the audiobook and attend the interview that was part of the study. I also screened for any conflict of interest between the researcher and the subjects, as defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement. After signing the consent forms, participants were provided with more information about the research, including the method to be employed, the research objectives, and the audiobook's title. Also, at this stage, subjects were asked to listen to the audiobook in seven days, amounting to a workload of 30 minutes a day. After listening to the audiobook, participants were ready for the interview. At this point, they were asked to book an interview appointment between 14 and 20 days after completing the audiobook. This gap between finishing the audiobook and the interview was selected so as to give participants sufficient time to experience the potential effects that the audiobook could have on their lives. Additionally, the timing of the interview was not so far in the future that participants would have forgotten the audiobook's effect on their experiences.

#### **Subject Recruitment**

The subjects selected for this research were five students enrolled in third- or fourth-year courses. They were recruited through a posted advertisement on *moodles* (a forum associated with York Universities' courses). Before recruitment, subjects were screened to make sure they were taking a full course load. The reason behind this criterion was to ensure that the research

subjects were experiencing a relatively similar academic workload. Comparing the effects of bibliotherapy on their lives would therefore be more reliable.

Important to note is that all the recruited students had taken one course during their undergraduate studies that had familiarized them with the basic concepts of mindfulness practices, such as breathing exercises and basic instructions on how to meditate. However none of them practiced mindfulness in any meaningful way and so they were novices in that regard.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through a 25- to 60-minute semi-structured interview with each research participant. Each participant attended a single one-on-one interview at a location agreed upon with the participant prior to the interview. Subjects were referred to in transcription and analysis of data by arbitrary numbers ranging from 1 to 5 to protect their identities.

The semi-structured interview format operated as a guided conversation between the interviewers and the interviewees, thus allowing the interviewers to address specific dimensions of the research while at the same time leaving space for the interviewees to offer unanticipated insights or new directions for study as part of an in-depth account of their experiences. A questionnaire including open- and close-ended questions helped guide the interviews. The questions and follow-up questions were designed to determine if the audiobook had had any effect on the participants' lives and, if so, what was the nature of those effects. As the interviews were semi-structured, the questions posed may have been altered in form or order at the time of the interview based on the responses of the interviewees. The purpose of an interview guide in semi-structured interviews is to help move the interview along. This format facilitates a more natural conversation between the researcher and participant while keeping both centered on the study at hand (Hermanowicz, 2002; Warren & Williams, 2008).

The interviews were taped using an audio recorder. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, with exactly the same words used by the interviewees included in the transcriptions. The interview questions were open ended, providing participants with opportunities to direct the dialogue and, ideally, increasing the freeness and openness of their responses.

### **Data Analysis**

We employed a phenomenological approach to analyzing our data. A phenomenological approach is not oriented toward finding patterns and commonalities within human experience, but instead seeks to discover some of the underlying structure or essence of that experience through the intensive study of individual cases (Creswell, 2013). In this project, we studied the phenomena of underlying reasons behind the changes students experienced during the period of our research.

After transcribing the interviews, I used three qualitative strategies to organize and analyse the collected data: coding, memoing, and integration.

In the coding stage, I coded the interview transcripts to extract the relevant themes introduced in the interview. I also searched for any other themes or sub-themes that might have helped to frame the information collected during the interview in relation to concepts offered by the book. Analyzing the themes that emerged from the interview transcriptions broadened my understanding of the underlying effects of mindfulness-based reading on research subjects. After identifying the theme that had had the most impact on the subjects, I aimed to identify key similarities/differences among each interview transcription. The similarities were used to infer a general effect of mindfulness-based content on research subjects. Similarities and differences were used to uncover any discrepancies among participants in relation to their experience.

During the memoing stage, I collected my personal opinions and thoughts as I was conducting the research. This information includes how I relate to the concepts myself, what occurred during the interviews, and how my thoughts and opinions changed during the course of the research. The collection of these allowed me to identify and interpret any potential effect I might have had on the results of the research.

Finally, during the integration process, I combined the data I had collected and analysed during the coding phase with any information I had from memoing in order to finalize the conclusion of the research.

### **Ethics, Approval, Confidentiality, and Informed Consent**

The project was approved by the ethics review as outlined by the York University Graduate Student Human Participants Research protocol. All information that might indicate a subject's personality was altered to protect the privacy of the subject. Participants were informed in every stage of the research—including recruitment, interview, and analysis—that they had the right to cease participation and remove their data from the research at any time. Transcripts and recordings of the interviews were stored on a password-protected hard drive accessible only to the researcher. The researcher and supervisors were the only individuals to review drafts of the thesis.

The participants were verbally informed before the interview about the process and were provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Waiver. Each participant was required to sign the Informed Consent Waiver before the interview.

### **Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind**

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (ZMBM), written by Shunryū Suzuki in 1970s, was the mindfulness-based audiobook employed in this research. Suzuki was a Zen monk and teacher

who helped popularize Zen Buddhism in the United States. Moreover, Suzuki is famous for founding the first Buddhist monastery outside Asia. I decided to use the audiobook version of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, which is 2 hours and 58 minutes long, because I thought that the intonation of the narrator, Peter Coyote, would help the research subjects to more clearly understand the concepts presented in the book.

Also, two features of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* prompted me to choose it for this research. Firstly, by explaining Zen philosophy (Buddhist ideas), the book provides an instruction-based structure that can provide students with a new philosophy of life and a new way to look at the fundamental natures of knowledge, reality, and existence. This instruction-based structure is believed to be the origin of the positive effect readers experience from mindfulness-based readings. Secondly, because of the fame and long history of the book, its content had been proven to be easily understandable, especially for individuals not experienced in reading articles about abstract subjects such as mindfulness.

## **Zen Philosophy**

The word *Zen* is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the Middle Chinese word 禪 (*dzjen*) /zɑ:'zɛn/, which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyāna* (ध्यान), which can be approximately translated as "absorption" or "meditative state" (Dumoulin & Heinrich, 1988). The practice of meditation entered China through the translations of *Dhyāna* (/dɪ'ɑ:nə/) sutras, which means "meditation summaries," and includes a collection of meditation texts from the first through the fourth centuries CE (Dumoulin & Heinrich, 1988).

Zen is, first and foremost, a set of practices that traditionally was transmitted from master to disciple, and originated in the spiritual enlightenment of Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha, who lived in India 2500 years ago. Those practices were designed to bring certain clarity to one's



life via freeing the mind from the slavery of words and the constriction of logic. Zen promotes the achievement of enlightenment by seeing one's original mind directly, without the intervention of the intellect. Original mind, which, in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (ZMBM), is referred to as beginner's mind, and which contains the innate primordial wisdom that allows us to see the world as it truly is. Zen philosophy encourages people to move the focus of their life from acquiring more information, more logic, more ego, and more skills, which supposedly would make them wise, to unlearning the learning they have accumulated that is thought to veil them from that wisdom. Upon such an understanding, it is believed, people will find not only what they themselves really are but also what the world actually is, and, with this understanding, they can then live a good life. In Zen philosophy, human beings cannot learn this truth by philosophizing, rational thought, the study of scriptures, participation in worship rites and rituals, or the other things that religious people do. As Suzuki mentioned, Zazen is a certain attitude toward elements of life that, when practiced, can become the source from which all the actions of daily life flow: eating, sleeping, breathing, walking, working, talking, thinking, and so on.

### **Dissection of the Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind**

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (ZMBM) is a book of teachings that were assembled from a series of lectures by the late master Shunryu Suzuki to a small group in Los Altos, California. In those talks, Suzuki introduced the basic, fundamental concepts of Zen philosophy by providing the instructions, stories, and descriptions designed to create the mental shift required to break out of everyday mental habits and observe the environment with a fresh mind, i.e., a 'beginner's' mind. ZMBM can be analyzed by dividing it into three sections roughly corresponding to body, feeling, and mind—"Right Practice," "Right Attitude," and "Right Understanding." The book contains many insights into meditation practice, focus on body postures, breathing, and focused

attention. However, Suzuki went beyond that to promote embracing a Zen attitude toward all things in life. He described enlightenment as a state of being that does not feel special to those who have experienced it. As he said, "To have some deep feeling about Buddhism is not the point; we just do what we do, like eating supper and going to bed." He encouraged his disciples to practice rather than dilute their action with thinking. He further emphasized the importance of focusing on the task at hand. As he mentions in one of his lectures, "When you do something, you should burn yourself completely, like a good bonfire, leaving no trace of yourself" (Suzuki & Dixon, 1989).

Posture, practice, and focus are not the only themes discussed in ZMBM. By using a coding technique, I identified 19 themes from the audiobook:

1. Acceptance
2. Being present
3. Avoid expectation
4. Attention
5. Change
6. Big I
7. Perfectionism
8. Non-judgment
9. Non-attachment
10. Nature of life
11. Gaining idea
12. Selflessness
13. Suffering

14. Self-observation
15. Emotional regulation
16. Unity
17. Nature of obstacles in life
18. Avoid binary thinking
19. Avoid expectations

Throughout the book, Suzuki discussed these themes and provided examples to make these concepts more understandable for his disciples.

Appendix 2 contains descriptions of how these themes are introduced in each chapter of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and what was emphasized regarding each theme. To facilitate the process of data analysis and comparison of the themes in the book with themes derived from the interviews, I broke each chapter down by the themes introduced in them (Appendix 2). This breakdown not only helped me to draw conclusions for this research, but, I believe, can be helpful for future researchers to choose one of the available mindfulness-based articles, looking to target a particular cohort with specific issues.

## **Interviews**

As mentioned before, this master's degree project attempted to answer two questions:

(a) Does bibliotherapy via an audiobook with minimal instruction remain effective in improving emotional regulation and reduction in perceived stress and anxiety for college students?

(b) And if so, what are the reasons behind its effect as perceived by the study subjects?

With these objectives in mind, I designed the interview questions in a way that would enable me to retrieve information from the subjects and from their answers to research questions. Because

the objective questions were based on the perceived emotions of anxiety and stress, subjects were asked to report their anxiety and stress levels on a scale of 1 to 10 before listening to the audiobook and after listening to the audiobook. Consequently, subjects were asked if they found that their levels of stress and anxiety prior to listening to the audiobook constituted a problem in their lives with which they were struggling. These questions were designed to help me understand the levels of the subjects' ability to deal with their emotions. After listening to the audiobook, the subjects were asked to describe how, where, and with what level of attention they had listened to the audiobook. These questions were designed to help me understand the relationship between the perceived effect of the audiobook on the subjects relative to the level of focus and attention they maintained while listening to the audiobook. A recall test was included as part of the questions in order to provide a level of reliability of the information provided by the research subjects. Between these questions, I sought opportunities to discover which themes and concepts that the subjects had found helpful. Each interview was concluded by two questions.

First, *Would you suggest this book to your friend?* This question was designed to help me understand the quality of the overall experience of the subjects while listening to the book. A subject reply that he or she would suggest the audiobook to friends would suggest that he or she evaluated the overall experience positively and experienced a positive effect from listening to the audiobook.

Second, *How would you describe the book to your friend when you recommend it?* This question was designed to provide the subjects with an opportunity to describe the general effect they experienced from the audiobook.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

In this chapter, I first provide general information about the research participants and their previous experiences in relation to mindfulness practices. To maintain each subject's privacy, they will be referred to as Subjects 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The numbers associated with each subject were assigned randomly and indicate no special meaning.

In the primary analysis of the interviews, I found that all subjects collectively reported a positive effect of the audiobook on how they felt. The degree as to how much they experienced the positive effect was quite variable, ranging from Subject 5, who reported that she experienced a positive feeling but the change was not at all significant, to Subject 4, who reported the ideas and concepts introduced in the audiobook had fundamentally changed his identity. In further analysis of the interviews, I extracted four themes, effects that all subjects unanimously reported that the audiobook had had on them, including reduction of stress and anxiety, improved focus, physical benefits, and a general positive feeling.

Each of the four main themes is discussed in greater detail below, and differences between underlying reasons behind those changes are explained.

### **General Positive Feeling**

When describing the effects of the audiobook, every subject, at some point in the interview, mentioned difficulty putting thoughts and feelings into words and describing them; nevertheless, each knew the nature of the feelings experienced were positive. This was put nicely into words by Subject 1, who said, "It was nice to listen to the book when I wasn't busy, it kinda made you relax ... 'cause it had that nice flow into it." Subject 4 mentioned, "He [the author] was saying that ... before we are born ... we exist, which gives me a good feeling just knowing

that believing in that simple sentence gives me a good feeling that we existed even before we born ... It felt good just listening to it.”

I believe one of the reasons that subjects felt they were unable to describe what they felt was the unusual structure of the audiobook, which provides the reader with descriptions of certain states of mind and examples to further clarify those concepts. However, at times, those descriptions and examples do not follow each other from one chapter to the next. Sometimes the author mentions a theme, for example “excitement,” and, in different chapters, he explores different aspects of this particular theme by providing different examples related to it in relation to the subject of each chapter. This structure eventually coalesces in the reader’s mind, but because it is not concise, it cannot be easily recalled.

In my opinion, another reason that the study’s subjects had difficulty specifying the details of the audiobook’s effect on them is the abstractive narration of the audiobook. At times, sentences do not necessarily try to reach a logical conclusion but rather create a vibe that helps the reader understand the themes better. For example, in Chapter 11, we hear, “It is necessary for us to keep the constant way. Zen is not some kind of excitement, but concentration on our usual everyday routine. If you become too busy and too excited, your mind becomes rough and ragged. This is not good.” Through these sentences the author is trying to emphasize the importance of focus and persistence; however, he does that by discouraging readers from being excited, describing the state of the excited mind as being “rough and ragged” during excitement.

The audiobook’s structure appeared to have two kinds of effects on the students. The first was the explicit effect, in which research subjects were able to explicitly mention and the cohesion of the concept was in a way that made it possible to be recalled easily. Second were the implicit effects, such as feelings of general positivity, although the listeners could not pinpoint

the details of how and why they had felt those feelings. In this research project, we dealt only with the explicit effects that the subjects clearly recalled during the interviews.

### **Reduction of Anxiety and Stress**

During the interviews, all participants reported improvement in reduction of stress and feelings of anxiety. The levels of the change they experienced were related to the initial stress levels they reported before starting the experiment. Before starting the audiobook, three of the five subjects reported that their stress levels were somewhere between 7 and 8 on a 10-point scale. After listening to the book, their stress levels were reduced to around 4 to 5. The other two subjects, who reported stress levels of 5 to 6, reported a reduction in their stress levels to 4 to 5.

When I asked the subjects how they usually dealt with their stress and anxiety, all subjects reported the use of breathing techniques and self-talk as ways to confront their emotional difficulties. However, they also mentioned that they were not consistent with their practice and that they used breathing techniques only when they feel overwhelmed by life situations. Subject 1 and Subject 5, who reported the least stress levels of 5 and 6, respectively, before listening to the audiobook, also reported practicing yoga on a weekly basis. However, they participate in yoga as a form of sport rather than as a practice in mindfulness. Studies have suggested that practicing yoga for one hour per week appears to provide reduction of stress and anxiety and an increase in health status (Smith, Hancock, Blake-Mortimer, & Eckert, 2007).

Subject 1, who reported a low level of anxiety before listening to the audiobook, said she felt improvement in her perspective toward her problems after listening to the part of the audiobook that says:

Usually when you do something, you want to achieve something, you attach to some result. From achievement to non-achievement means to be rid of the unnecessary and bad

results of effort. If you do something in the spirit of non-achievement, there is a good quality in it. So just to do something without any particular effort is enough. When you make some special effort to achieve something, some excessive quality, some extra element is involved in it. You should get rid of excessive things.

Subject 1 said that one of the problems that caused her anxiety was to focus on the results of her actions. She always focused on the goal, which increased her anxiety and, at times, negatively affected the result of her action. But after listening to the audiobook, she had more clarity regarding the nature of her actions, which was just to express herself as best she can and be present to change her self-expression accordingly in regard to the result she desires.

The underlying reason behind the improvement in the levels of anxiety and stress reported by the subjects is rooted in many different themes and examples mentioned in ZMBM. For example, as Subject 2 mentioned, when he missed his midterm exam because of an illness, an occurrence that would usually have caused him emotional difficulty, he thought of this part of the audiobook: “If you have a stomachache, your stomach is healthy enough to have pain. But if your stomach becomes accustomed to its poor condition, you will have no pain. That is awful! You will be coming to the end of your life from your stomach trouble.” This example helped him to shift his focus from the complication of missing an exam to being grateful for the pain his body was feeling and eventually restoring his health to normal.

Also, Subject 2 experienced a falling out with one of his best friends several days after finishing the book. He said that the theme of “acceptance” in the ZMBM helped him to deal with the anxiety of this falling out. He stated:

I know this is a coincidence, but, like, I would say maybe a couple days after finishing the book and understanding it [the concepts in the audiobook], I had, like, a falling out



with one of my best friends. And, like, you know, I found it emotionally hard. But then there were some going back to my notes there were some pointers that helped me to deal with that too ... At the end of the book, it says, like, you should understand that everything is always changing and I should accept that truth. If you don't accept that truth, you'll suffer, right? From that and it also says to do that is to let things be the way they are. Don't try to control people or anything, so let them act the way they are and just observe them. So, sure, me and my best friend fight even though it was completely their fault. I could have been trying to look for some way to get back at them.... But I didn't do that. I'm, like, OK. Let's wait. Let's see what they do. Let's see how they react.... I'm just going to let things be. And also if, you know, a couple weeks passed and nothing happened too and we're really not friends anymore. That's fine! I got to accept the fact that things change. Everything's transient. And it's hard to deal with the emotions. But that's something that I got to improve on and get better.

In another part of the interview, Subject 2 talked about the concept of “calmness” and how the definition of ZMBM had helped him to change his perspective and decrease his stress level. The author of ZMBM said, “We say, in calmness there should be activity; in activity there should be calmness. Actually, they are the same thing; to say 'calmness' or to say 'activity' is just to express two different interpretations of one fact. There is harmony in our activity, and where there is harmony there is calmness.”

Regarding this part of the book, Subject 2 stated:

It [author of the book] said the real calmness is found in activity ... That really hit me. Because I'm, like, yeah. It's really easy for everyone to be calm when you do nothing, I mean just sitting around. But if you're doing your tasks in life and going through life

activity and you're calm, that's real calmness, and by calm means, calm here [pointing to his head], right? Because you know you're right. Any thoughts going around or anything, you know things are in your control and you're your own master, right? So there's a sense of calmness ... It was really stuck out to me.

In the interview with Subject 3, she talked about her problem with overthinking and the anxiety that resulted from that. She said, “I think for me why I get it [anxiety] is because I overthink everything. That's my thing. Like, I know that's my problem. I overthink a lot of things and that causes me to be just overthinking in general, just makes me more anxious about everything. If I just didn't think about it as much, then I wouldn't. I don't think I would be as anxious.” She cited the part of ZMBM that states: “Usually our mind is very busy and complicated, and it is difficult to be concentrated on what we are doing. This is because before we act, we think, and this thinking leaves some trace. Our activity is shadowed by some preconceived idea. The thinking not only leaves some trace or shadow, but also gives us many other notions about other activities and things. These traces and notions make our minds very complicated.” These words helped her to change her perspective about overthinking before every action and instead focus on the action itself. She said she felt more relaxed to start the task she needed to attend to, knowing she had changed her focus from the planning portion of the task to participating in the task itself.

In another interview, Subject 4 reported that the concept of focusing on practice rather than result helped him to deal with his stress about the exam. He stated:

And I was stressed out because I had these courses that I was never, like, ready for it, and I didn't study good for it. It was a distressing time, and that was when I started studying the book. I mean listening to the audiobook, and I would read the book I guess 10

minutes, 15 minutes a night and that would actually help me a lot in terms of it wouldn't talk anything about like how to deal with the exams, but it would tell me how unnecessary it is to be worried about this kind of stuff [result of the exam]. That we need to focus on process and it's probably not the best thing to be focused on what would happen in the exam.

Subject 4, who was in transition from a kinesiology program to a computer science program, talked about the discomfort he felt about his decision. He said he felt the years he spent studying kinesiology had been a waste. He said that the concept of the “big I” and “small I” from ZMBM helped him to find comfort regarding his decision. The ZMBM’s author says, “Moment after moment we are creating something, and this is the joy of our life. But this ‘I’ which is creating and always giving out something is not the ‘small I’; it is the ‘big I.’” In other part of his interview, he added, “And we should forget, day by day, what we have done; this is true non-attachment. And we should do something new. To do something new, of course we must know our past, and this is all right. But we should not keep holding on to anything we have done; we should only reflect on it.” About this part of the audiobook, Subject 4 said, “It's actually funny that I actually decided to do something [in computer science] related to kinesiology at the end, but then I decided that knowing I shouldn't be influenced by what happened to me before. So I still did the same decision but, like, with more confidence. And that confidence made me, you know, calm. It reduced my anxiety level a lot.”

In many parts of the interview, Subject 4 returned to the concept of the “big I and the small I” as one of the most influential themes of the audiobook in his life. He said that, while he was listening to the audiobook with his girlfriend while he was driving, he experienced a

moment of realization about his life purpose, which he recalls as “enlightenment.” He described this thusly:

I remember that I pulled over and I hugged her [his girlfriend] and I kissed her. I was, like, OK. This is my enlightenment time. Let me tell you what happened. I have this cousin. Let me start from here. I did kinesiology. I was doing, like, more let's say physiology kind of stuff, neuroscience, and then I did computer science and I was all over the place. I didn't know what to do. I had no idea how I could help people. So, we got into this moment that we start talking about my cousin who's actually is in a wheelchair because of an accident, and I came with this idea that maybe my purpose of life could be just making sure that I can use my knowledge and kinesiology and computer science to help him walk again. He's actually in a wheelchair, and I was thinking that that's where I start by not thinking about myself. So. I did the kinesiology, I did the computer science, but the 'big I' could be the one who can help him to walk again because I was thinking, like, this is 21st century; this is ridiculous. People still in wheelchairs? So there should be some way to help people in a wheelchair to walk. And now I feel like my life has purpose and it makes me so happy and calm.

In another part of his interview, Subject 4 talked about the positive effect of the audiobook on his life as it confirmed many beliefs that he had had but was not sure of. He stated:

I feel like some of this stuff [mentioned in the audiobook] for me was common sense and knowing that he [the author] knows this stuff that I know as well, was, like, you know, the confirmation I need. For example, he was talking about Buddha as not being somewhere else but actually being inside you, as you are Buddha. And that's a feeling I

always had about God. It was like whoever however God is the most important part is that I can be a part of it. And that just comforts me.

Throughout their interviews, the subjects talked about many themes and subthemes that had improved their anxiety levels. In an analysis of those themes, we can sum up four themes that were introduced by all subjects as the main reason for the improvement they experienced. The first was focus on process rather than goals. Second was understanding the limitations of human nature and focusing on what we can change rather than thinking about things we cannot change. Third was acceptance and appreciation for life experiences. Fourth was highlighting the importance of understanding the universal nature of human beings rather than their individuality.

### **Improvement of Attention**

I am reporting the improvement in the subjects' attention in a separate section because, after analysis of the interview transcriptions, I felt that the emphasis of the research subjects on change in their attention deserved to be highlighted separately. However, research has shown that prolonged stress levels result in distraction (Keogh & French, 2001) and that improvement in stress level naturally improves attention level. Therefore, much of the effect the research subjects felt could have been due to reductions in their stress levels. Having said that, in this section, I discuss the part of the audiobook that was recalled by all subjects as the theme that resulted in their behavioural change. The ZMBM states:

In order not to leave any traces, when you do something, you should do it with your whole body and mind; you should be concentrated on what you do. You should do it completely, like a good bonfire. You should not be a smoky fire. You should burn yourself completely. If you do not burn yourself completely, a trace of yourself will be left in what you do. You will have something remaining which is not completely

burned out. Zen activity is activity which is completely burned out, with nothing remaining but ashes. This is the goal of our practice. That is what Dogen meant when he said, 'Ashes do not come back to firewood.' Ash is ash. Ash should be completely ash. The firewood should be firewood. When this kind of activity takes place, one activity covers everything.

During the interview, Subject 5 mentioned social media and environmental distractions as one of her daily struggles. However, she was aware of the negative effects of multitasking on the quality of the work she does, and she found the audiobook's explanation of the reason behind single-minded focus to be very helpful in her behavioural changes. During her interview, she said, "It did improve my concentration because I would try to, I think sometimes, like, I end up taking on too much as too much at once to try to do so many things at once and I end up, like, not doing nothing at all. I like how the book explained it, so now, like, when I try to do things, I try to do one thing at a time, and it helps a lot."

Subject 3 reported the same effect. She said:

Most people try to do everything at the same time, and you're less likely to do those things if you're doing them all at the same time. So I think once you do one thing, you're more concentrated on that and naturally you're going to do well on it because you're only doing one thing. Sometimes I would have a lot of things to do in a day, for example, and I would try to have more than one window open literally on my computer like I'm doing two or three things at the same time.

She went on to say how the audiobook made behaviour changes in the way she approached her activity. She said, "I think that's why I'm more concentrated now I guess. Since I'm only doing one thing at the time it helps because, like, now I'm just concentrating on one thing."

Subject 4, who described himself as somewhat of a perfectionist, talked about his difficulty with planning and finding the right times to do things. Sometimes he would plan all day as to how he wanted to execute his to-do list, but, at the end of the day, he felt that he had not accomplished all he would have liked to. During the interview, he mentioned that he received a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD), and, since a car accident he had had two years earlier, he felt his disorder was becoming more severe and that he needed to take "ADD pills," as he called it, to overcome his distractions. During the interview, he said the part of the audiobook where the author states:

You may say, 'This is bad, so I should not do this.' Actually, when you say, 'I should not do this,' you are doing not-doing in that moment. So there is no choice for you. When you separate the idea of time and space, you feel as if you have some choice, but actually, you have to do something, or you have to do not-doing. Not-to-do something is doing something. Good and bad are only in your mind. So, we should not say, 'This is good,' or 'This is bad.' Instead of saying bad, you should say, "not-to-do"! If you think, 'This is bad,' it will create some confusion for you. So in the realm of pure religion, there is no confusion of time and space, or good or bad. All that we should do is just do something as it comes. Do something! Whatever it is, we should do it, even if it is not-doing something.

This passage helped him to see the problem in his approach to executing his to-do list. He said, "Back then I was so worried about being concentrated on something that feeling would even get me more distracted. But nowadays, as I told you, I even stopped the pills [ADD pills] so, I'm like, this has to be done, and I'm here to do this. So I start doing it." He continued, "There was this course I really wanted to take online, and I always had the feeling that I can't do it, I don't

have time, I can't concentrate. So many other things happening in my life. But I just did it. I started in January 1st and I can easily say I just finished one-fourth of it, which is nice”

[Interview January 8 2019]

To sum up, the main theme that was referred to by subjects as to why they felt improvement in their attention was the emphasis of the book on doing one thing at a time and being present with what one is doing.

### **Physical Benefits**

In the first part of ZMBM, the author talks about right practice, and, as part of the right practice, he emphasizes the importance of posture and breathing. For example, about posture, the author says,

So try always to keep the right posture, not only when you practice zazen, but in all your activities. Take the right posture when you are driving your car, and when you are reading. If you read in a slumped position, you cannot stay awake long. Try. You will discover how important it is to keep the right posture. This is the true teaching. The teaching which is written on paper is not the true teaching. Written teaching is a kind of food for your brain. Of course, it is necessary to take some food for your brain, but it is more important to be yourself by practicing the right way of life.

In another chapter, the author talks about the importance of breathing.

When we practice zazen, our mind always follows our breathing. When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless. We say 'inner world' or 'outer world,' but actually there is just one whole world. In this limitless world, our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out like someone passing



through a swinging door. If you think, 'I breathe,' the 'I' is extra. There is no you to say 'I.' What we call 'I' is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no 'I,' no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door.

During the interviews, all subjects except Subject 5 reported the positive effect of the book on their health. For example, Subject 1 explained how listening to the audiobook helped her to pay more attention to her sitting posture. She said, “You know how he says how you sit up straight? That is something that I've been using a lot at work because I'm always slouching so that [advice on posture] has been helping me a lot, too. So in the past four weeks, I've been using it, and it's been consistent.”

Subject 2 reported the same effect: “Before reading the book, the way I would do my readings was to read them on my laptop, or the ebook format so, like, I just lay on my bed and had my laptop just read, and you know what? I'll just take notes on the computer, right? But now after this [listening to the audiobook], I get a desk and a chair, so I just sit on that and then I do my things and I feel like the slouchiness has decreased and because of that I have more energy to read.”

The effect of posture on energy and mood was also reported by Subject 4: “I know that it [posture] had, like, so many effects on people's lives, but in my situation, it mostly had an effect on my mood. So the days that I wasn't in a good mood I was more, like, you know, bent over and sit like not tight enough. But the day that I trying ... either I was in a good mood or I was trying to sit up straight or sit in a heads-up position to change my posture so that could improve my mood as well.”

Apart from advice on posture, advice in the audiobook on breathing helped Subject 1 to deal with her insomnia:

Before sleeping, I do meditate, like, I do the deep breathing. That's how he [author of the book] said you have to focus on your breathing. Always think about your breathing. And that is all that matters, you know, so that's what I do before I sleep. And it's so helpful because I usually wake up in the middle of the night like, well, it's just been happening for the past week. So this has actually, like, helped minimize it.

During his interview, Subject 4 talked about the positive impact that the audiobook had had on his health as a function of a change in his identity. Subject 4, who is a regular smoker, talked about how he had tried many times to quit smoking and said the book helped him to change his perspective so that he now saw his health as a responsibility he needs to take on to change for the better. He said:

I was, like, things have to happen. I mean it has to happen. If we want to be, like, a different person, then things about me have to change. I can't be, like, the same smoker and thinking about going to the gym and having a healthier life being in a healthy position. So I was, like, things should make sense together since I stopped smoking. That pushed me more to do exercise. Since I'm doing exercise, that pushed me to do, like, meditation and be in a good posture as well.

To sum up, all subjects except one reported behavioural changes that brought physical benefit to them. The underlying theme that brought about the change was the emphasis of ZMBM on paying attention to spinal alignment and posture and the importance of breathing to one's mental state.

## Overall Subject Experience

In answer to the question, *How would you describe the book when you suggest it to your friend?*, they all replied that the change in perspective and shift in everyday mental habits was the biggest effect of the audiobook. For example, Subject 3 said she had recommended the book to her parents already, and the reason she did was because she thinks the concept in the audiobook would expand her father's vision on how he could approach life and the obstacles he faces in everyday life because he is always stressed. In reply to the same question, Subject 2 said:

It just gives you a different way of thinking about the things you do in your everyday life. It's, like, it shows you another perspective. Like, for example, I was talking about the pain and how I always perceive that as oh my God it's a bad thing. But now I ask myself, 'How do you feel? Why does this happen to me?' After reading this book, it gave me a new perspective of pain. You know what I mean? Maybe pain sometimes tells you that you are OK. I mean, that's why you have that pain. So now the next time something happens to me I'm not going to be as upset about it as before. So it gives you a new perspective. And it's just a new way of thinking, which I don't think we get this type of thinking from going through our schools.

In response to the question, *Why do you think people need to listen to this audiobook?*, Subject 4 said: "Because you need to know your purpose in life. It might not reflect the same thing from the book for everyone, but it gives you that notion to find yourself, to find out who you are, to find out what you want to do, find out what's better for you to do, and I would explain it as a book to tell you the purpose of life."

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through analysis of the themes and subthemes introduced by the research subjects about the effect of the audiobook, four main effects were derived: improvement in stress and anxiety, improved focus, physical benefits, and a general positive feeling. The basis of all these effects was a change in perspective that resulted in behavioural changes. The degree to which subjects experienced these effects varied and seems to have been related to the subject's baseline at the beginning of the research. For example, the research subject who was most concerned about his anxieties had the most to say about improvement in his anxiety.

### Final Note

During the interviews, the study's subjects were asked several questions designed to help me better understand the reliability of the information provided by them. One of the questions was, *What was the level of your attention while listening to the audiobook?* Subjects 1 and 4 listened to the audiobook while driving to school and working as well as at nighttime. The other three subjects listened to the audiobook before they went to bed. They also mentioned, however, that, although it would not happen often, they would fall asleep while listening to the audiobook. Then, for the next listening session, they would rewind and listen to the audiobook from where they remembered.

My second question was a recall test. I asked the subjects about random themes from the audiobook and asked them to recall whatever they could remember about those themes. All the subjects, except Subject 5, were able to recall three or more parts of the book from the theme I asked about. Subject 5 failed to recall any context about the themes that I asked her about, and, when I asked her to recall the theme that she remembered, she replied, "The themes that

resonated with me was the ones he was, like, basically giving you advice like telling you what you should do. Like how you should approach your life in a certain way.”

The number of the questions for all interviews was the same, and most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. The interview with Subject 5 lasted only about 23 minutes because she was unable to provide detailed answers to my questions. She also mentioned during the interview that the time she was assigned to the research had overlapped with her final exams, when she was quite busy. Overall, I believe the vast majority of the information reported by all subject is quite reliable. However Subject 5, because of her workload and other life commitments, was not able to pay attention to the book to the level that would enable us to derive any meaningful information from her experience with it.

## **Memoing**

I studied ZMBM during the last year of my undergraduate studies. At that time, trying to deal with the discomfort of what I needed to do next was one of my biggest challenges. During that time, I tried many books and mentors to find some sort of help to answer the question what is the purpose of my life. During that time, Dr. Shehid, the supervisor of this project, suggested that I study ZMBM. Although I was familiar with many fundamental concepts of Zen philosophy, after reading the ZMBM, I found much relief in my thinking about the future. ZMBM helped me to form some sort of intellectual framework in which I was able to navigate my passions and dreams for the future. Because I was always interested in public health and providing mental and physical care for my community, I decided to further study the effects of this book on other students and possibly promote its positive effects to future generations of students. During the research design, because I was aware of my own biases about the positive effect of the book, I decided to reduce my role in the research as much as I could. I attempted

doing that by not providing any information about the content and effect of the audiobook on me to the subjects before, during, and after the interviews. However, this rule was broken once during my interview with Subject 2, who, after the interview when we were saying goodbye, asked how my experience with the book was. I replied that the book had a positive effect on my life. I believe that, because this conversation happened after the interview, it did not affect the results in any way.

I tried to keep my questions neutral. For example, I asked subjects, *What were the effects of the audiobook on your life?* rather than, *How did you like the audiobook?* to retrieve organic and nonebiased data. I also tried to include the same principle in my body language and facial expressions. I tried not to promote or avoid any specific direction in our conversation by asking questions like, *Can you please expand on your point?* However, I tried to introduce questions that helped me dissect the points made by the subjects.

Because I wanted to improve the reliability of the information the subjects provided, I made sure to avoid pressuring them to answer my questions. I would usually ask a question and, if a subject needed, I would provide more details concerning my question. However, if the subject did not have an answer to my question, I would not create a pressure environment so that he or she had to provide an answer. I would just move on to another question and continue with the interview.

During the interviews, when subjects wanted to recall a theme or an example from the interview, they were often not able to fully remember or recall the theme. In these cases, I helped the subjects to recall the theme and followed that with questions to confirm what they actually meant. We continued this process until I made sure the subjects fully expressed what they wanted to express.

During the interviews, I had a notepad available to take notes on body language and any issues that might come up during or after the interview. However, because all subject seemed very relaxed and conversations went smoothly, those notes did not play any role in the study's data analysis.

### **Future Research**

By reviewing the reports provided by subjects about the positive effects of listening to the audiobook, I believe further study is needed in how to integrate mindfulness-based readings and audiobooks into the curriculum of undergraduate students, not necessarily as a requirement but rather as a suggestion that could potentially improve their lives. Such a study could be divided into two segments: First, quantitative research should be conducted to improve the reliability of the reported data and to gain a better understanding of the effect of the audiobook on mass students; Second, a study of the best practices of suggesting such a book to students should be conducted to improve the participation rate and reduce the social biases that stop students from studying mindfulness-based philosophy books.

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## **Appendix 1 : Questions**

1. From 1 to 10, how would describe the level of your anxiety in general?
2. From 1 to 10, how would describe the level of your distraction in daily life?
3. How do you manage your anxiety and stress? Do you have any specific strategy?
4. Have you practiced any sort of mindfulness practice before participating in this research?

Regarding the book:

1. How would you describe the level of focus and attention while you were reading the book? 1. location 2. time 3. focus
2. From the perspective of difficulty to understand, how did you find the concepts of the audiobook?
3. Any negative issue you experienced while reading the book?
4. What do you think about the book? and how do you think it affected you, if any ?
5. Did you practice any of the instructions the book provided regarding meditation?
6. Did the book have any effect in the way you face your stress and manage your anxiety?
7. Did the book have any effect in they way to improve your concentration?
8. Can you please recall the theme that stuck to you the most about the audiobook or that you found had the biggest effect on you?
9. Would you recommend this book to your friends?
10. If you would recommend the book to your friends, you would say you need to read this book because ... ?
11. As part of the research, I hope the book will help students to manage their anxiety and stress. In that regard, how would you say we can improve this process for future students?

## Appendix 2

### Zen Mind Beginners' Mind Thematic Coding:

#### Chapter 1 : "Beginner's Mind"

1. Defines the difficulty of practicing zen as difficulty to keep our mind and practice pure in its fundamental sense.
2. Highlights the importance of keeping a beginner's mind toward every action. In order word, highlight the importance of freedom from our biases. "Beginner's mind is ready for anything"
3. Highlights the importance of selflessness and managing one's desire to achieve. In order word, paying attention to process, not the goal.

#### Chapter 2: "right practice: posture"

1. Highlights the importance of posture, to keep your spin erect and bring attention to your body.
2. Highlights the importance of thinking about mind-body connection as not one and not two.
3. Highlights the importance of avoiding distraction by future goal. Being present and paying attention to now is the goal.
4. Defines enlightenment as a state of mind when one maintaining a right posture.

#### Chapter 3: "breathing"

1. Defines "I" as one's breathing.
2. Highlight the importance of being aware of your breathing.
3. Explains the idea of time and space. The fact that we are ought to do one thing after the other, and there is no choice in that.

4. Highlight the importance of understanding the nature of life as not binary and divided.

Everything in nature depend on each other, but they are not dependant on each other.

#### Chapter 4: “control”

1. Defines state of nature as imbalance in the background of full balance .
2. Defines “suffering” as lack of understanding of the nature of life. Explains suffering as how we live.
3. Explains the nature of “control” as not trying to control, but to carefully watch what you want to control. It further explains to control one self, one needs to be able to watch his/her thought and not be bothered with them.
4. Secret of Zen practice is to learn to watch your thoughts without trying to engage with them.
5. Highlight the importance concentrating on life’s circumstances in order to be able to see them as what they are.
6. Defines “freedom” as understanding the rules of nature.

#### Chapter 5: “Mind weeds”

1. Symbolises Life problems and challenges as mind weed. And explains the mind weed is actually what helps us to grow and encourages us to be grateful for, “weeds”, the difficulties in our life since it will enrich our lives.
2. Highlight the importance of paying attention to understand the process of how problems can improve our lives.

#### Chapter 6: “marrow of zen”

1. Provides example of 4 kinds of horse where the best is horse learnt to move even before the whip of the rider reach its skin, and the worst would not move unless pain of

whipping reach its bone marrow. However, everyone wants to be the best horse. Buddah says the worst horse might be the best horse since it has more potential to learn.

2. Highlight the importance of imperfection. The one with imperfections, always trying to be perfect which can make them always aware of themselves. However, if you think you are perfect, then lack of attention to yourself will make you not so great.

#### Chapter 7: “bowing”

1. Explains “bowing” as giving up one’s dualistic ideas. To see everything as one.
2. Highlight the importance of maintaining “big mind”. The state of mind where everyone and everything are united as one. Where we get rid of our biases.

#### Chapter 8 : “nothing special”

1. Explains the nature of human beings that always is doing something.
2. Highlight the importance when one has the idea of attaining something by doing, they are actually unlikely to take action and do anything. But when we get rid of gaining ideas, then we actually do something.
3. True practice is when you do something to express one’s innermost nature. When one does something just for the sake of gaining an end result, this is not a good practice.
4. Defines “buddha nature” as existing. When one is being resent and express its most inner nature, they are buddha. Buddha nature is human nature, is very expression of our existence.
5. Explains when one is not expressing him/herself, s/he does not exist. S/he is an illusion.
6. Highlight the importance of getting rid of all dualistic ideas, and be present to express ourselves.

#### Chapter 9 : “single-minded way”

1. Highlight the importance of perspective toward task. Whatever we do in part of practice to express ourselves. There is not preparation or relaxation after practice. They are all part of practice as a whole. Example of cooking: Cooking is itself the goal, without having the goal of prepared food in mind.
2. Highlight the importance of appreciating process and not focusing on the goal. This is expressing our sincerity.

Highlight the importance of not focusing on how exactly path get us to a certain goal. As long as one is expressing his/her nature. The buddha nature, human nature, would take care of the goal.

#### Chapter 10 : “repetition”

1. Highlights the importance of willing to experience repetition in life with vitality and keeping original mind.
2. Highlight the importance of avoiding perfectionism which results in despair.
3. Explain secret of practice as to commit to action and just express ourselves.

#### Chapter 11: “zen and excitement”

1. Highlight the importance of keeping calm and focusing on task at hand.
2. Explains building character as constant focused effort toward a task at hand.
3. Highlight the importance of avoiding multitasking. Constant effort toward a task at hand is the secret of practice.

#### Chapter 12: “right effort”

1. Explains the effort from achievement to non-achievement. This means to start an action with having a goal in mind, but execute without focusing on achieving the goal rather than focusing on the process.

Highlight the importance of understanding the difference between setting up a goal and attaching to a goal.

#### Chapter 13: “No trace”

1. Highlight the importance of understanding the difference between setting goals versus developing preconceived idea about reaching the goal.
2. Highlight the importance of avoiding expectation and focusing on task at hand.
3. Highlight the importance of fully be involved in the task at hand and managing one's inhibition
4. Highlight the importance of avoiding perfectionism.

#### Chapter 14: “god given”

1. Explains joy of human life as moment-after-moment expressing ourselves.
2. Highlight the importance of practicing non-attachment by giving.
3. Explains in spirit of non-attachment. Giving either word of wisdom or a physical material would be "Dana Prajna Paramita." Dana Prajna Paramita, means to give.
4. Highlight the importance of focusing on the present and not let future and past gets in the way of what we are doing now.

#### Chapter 15: “mistake in practice”

1. Explains that working toward a gaining idea which create an idealistic goal, will leave one unsatisfied since the gaining idea will always move the goal further away toward another gaining idea.
2. Highlight the importance of realizing when one gets tired and discussed with the practice, it's because s/he has gaining idea.

3. Highlight the importance of constant practicing without developing expectation to gain anything. Practicing is one's self expression.
4. Explains the fact that enlightenment does not necessarily feel great to who has it. Even if one does not feel enlightenment, s/he will be enlightened as long as s/he keeps practicing.
5. Highlight the importance of avoiding perfectionism but realizing that even though your practice might not be great. But as long as you keep practicing knowing your imperfections, this is still a good practice.

#### Chapter 16: "limiting your activity"

1. Highlight the importance of avoiding practice with bias. And realizing there is no specific way to accomplish a goal.
2. Highlight the importance of every method of practice has some weakness. And if one is identified with a certain method sooner or later s/he will be facing limitations in their practice.
3. Highlight the importance of focusing on the moment in order to able to fully express yourself.
4. Defines a secret of practice as single minded effort on a task at hand, right now.

#### Chapter 17: "study yourself"

1. Define the goal of studying Buddhism as studying ourselves.
2. Highlight the importance of understanding the role of teaching and teacher.
3. Highlight the importance of staying independent from the teachings. One needs lessons in order to understand the nature of things, but one always needs to be an independent thinker and stay away from depending on the teacher.



4. Defines teacher and lectures and discussions as mean to study ourselves. But it is very important to remember the final goal is to study ourselves.
5. Highlight the importance of always changing nature of human beings. So as we study ourselves we still need to detach ourselves from what we learn about ourselves.

#### Chapter 18/19: “to polish a tile”

1. Explains zazen as ordinary everyday life. If you one looks to achieve enlightenment then s/he will not be enlightened. But when you just live your ordinary life with attention to present moment that is enlightenment.
2. Highlight the importance of keeping a real mind. Real mind is when you are present and not deluded with ideas other than yourself.
3. Explain life as problem. And in order to solve the problem one needs to become one with the problem.
4. Highlight the importance of understanding that whatever problem we feel within us. And therefore we need to look within to solve the problem.
5. Define zazen as being present and participate in one continuous effort to express yourself

#### Chapter 20: “Nirvana, the water-fall”

1. Describe the difficulty of human experience is because of duality from their surrounding and problems.
2. Highlight the importance of fear comes when you feel separated from the universe. If you feel you are one with universe there is not fear.
3. Explain one needs to reach the understanding of unity with the universe till s/he can enjoy her/his life.

#### Chapter 21: “Right understanding”

1. Highlight the importance of practice rather than understanding.
2. Highlight the importance of posture and breathing rather than understanding zazen.
3. Describe egoistic ideas as illusion. Ego is covering our buddha nature. Buddha nature is true nature of human being.
4. Highlight the importance of getting rid of gaining idea, since it would delude the true nature of human beings.
5. Highlight the importance of posture and breathing as very nature of zazen, not a instrument to reach enlightenment.
6. Highlight the importance of being present and putting your effort in this moment.
7. Highlight the importance of practicing rather than trying to understand the philosophy of zazen.

#### Chapter 22 : “Transiency”

1. Explains very fundamental of Zazen as understanding the always changing nature of everything
2. Defines Nature of everything as change.
3. Defines cause of human suffering as not accepting the change that is nature of everything.
4. Explains basic teaching of buddhism as learning from difficulties and suffering.
5. Explains one has accepted the transiency who take pleasure from suffering, since suffering is very nature of life.

#### Chapter 23: “emptiness”

1. Explain the idea of existentialism as illusion.

2. Highlight the importance of understanding that what might exist today, might not exist tomorrow. And promotes appreciating the present and take action right here, right now.
3. Highlight the importance of understanding oneself in order to understand the world.
4. Explain the importance of self regulation and how one needs to have control over what s/he feels.

#### Chapter 24: “to believe in nothing”

1. Highlight the importance of believing in nothing. Or getting rid of all biases.
2. Highlight the importance of being open minded and keep the original beginner's mind.
3. Highlight the importance of being present and trusting yourself.

#### Chapter 25: “original Buddhism”

1. Highlight the importance of non-attachment to any specific way of thinking.

#### Chapter 26: “buddha’s enlightenment”

1. Explains everything is buddha nature. And whatever nature does is practice.
2. Describe being master of your emotion and surrounding as buddha nature. Attaining enlightenment is always to be with buddha (having control of yourself and not lose yourself in the surrounding)